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ABSTRACT

Scotland, like many countries, has a system of externally-administered syllabus-based examinations, set at two points: the end of compulsory schooling, which serves as a basis for entry to junior college "non-advanced further education" (mainly vocationally oriented); and at the end of grade 12, which serves as a basis for admission to college. In this tradition, educational reform is frequently "examination led". That is, public (external) examinations are used as the lever to change curriculum. A major reform of external examinations and related curricula has taken place in Scotland. There is now a common structure for the education of all pupils with some choice of actual subjects. The examination system has been reformed to provide an external examination for all pupils in all of the major areas of the curriculum: English, mathematics, science, social studies, foreign languages, aesthetic subjects, and vocational subjects. The examination will be set at three different levels. There is, however, no expectation that this will lead to tracks; rather there will be cross-setting, i.e., virtually all pupils will take different subjects at at least two levels and those taking some subjects at the most advanced level will be taking others at the two lower levels. (Author)

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ASSESSMENT FOR ALL

W. B. Dockrell

Abstract

Scotland like many countries has a system of externally administered syllabus based examinations, set at two points.

a. "Ordinary grade", the end of compulsory schooling (Grade II) which serves as a basis for entry to junior college "non-advanced further education" (mainly vocationally oriented) and,

b. "Higher grade", the end of grade 12 which serves as a basis for admission to college and university.

In this tradition educational reform is frequently "examination led". That is, public (external) examinations are used as the lever to change curriculum.

A major reform of external examinations and related curricula has taken place in Scotland. There is now a common structure for the education of all pupils with some choice of actual subjects. The examination system has been reformed to provide an external examination for all pupils in all of the major areas of the curriculum, English, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Foreign Languages, Aesthetic subjects and vocational subjects.

The examination will be set at three different levels. There is however, no expectation that this will lead to tracks, rather there will be cross-setting i.e. virtually all pupils will take different subjects at at least two levels and those taking some subjects at the most advanced level will be taking others at the two lower levels.

These reforms are now being implemented in the schools.

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A PAPER FOR THE 9 th INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF IAEA BLANTYRE, MALAWI, JUNE 1983

ASSESSMENT FOR ALL

By Dr W B Dockrell, Scottish Council for Research in Education

By the middle 1970's it became clear that the administrative changes which had taken place in secondary education in Scotland carried with them great implications for the curriculum and for assessment. Eleven years of schooling had been made compulsory and virtually all pupils were in comprehensive schools which provided for the full range of achievement. The arrangements that had been proposed in advance, a division of pupils into the top third or so who would follow an academic curriculum and the remaining two-thirds which would have a curriculum with "the vocational impulse" as its motivating force had not proved acceptable. A number of major criticisms were made. One was that for those less academically successful an inappropriate curriculum was contributing to indiscipline and truancy, to boredom and to alienation from the school. Whereas for those who were more successful the schools were in danger of becoming cramming institutions, concentrating on examination subjects and failing to ensure the total development of each pupil's personality. It was argued too that one consequence of introducing the comprehensive school system was that the courses were not sufficiently demanding for the most successful. A further criticism was that education was "irrelevant", that is, that it was failing to prepare young people for life in a modern industrial society.

Consequently, a Committee was established to examine the curriculum. This Committee as is the practice in Britain was known by the name of its chairman, as the Munn Committee and the report from that Committee is called the Munn Report. The Committee asked fundamental questions . "What educational aims should the schools set themselves? What human capacities should they try to foster? What kinds of knowledge are of most worth" (Page 15). In our terms what must everybody know? They answered the question by looking at a series of claims, those which stem from social, from epistemological and from psychological approaches to the whole curriculum, that is, to the needs of society, to the nature of knowledge and to the nature of the individual. On the basis of their consideration of these factors they tried to produce a curriculum design in which all the competing claims were reconciled and in which all relevant factors were balanced .

The Committee suggested that there were four sets of aims for the schools. The first concerned the development of knowledge and understanding. Pupils should not only understand the physical world and society but also should explore the world of subjective experience and relationships with others.

The second set of aims is concerned with skills. First, were cognitive skills, like the ability to read, to handle numbers, to communicate effectively in speech and writing, to interpret diagramatic material, to hypothesise, to enquire, to evaluate, criticise and to create. Second, there were psychomotor skills, like the ability to play games, to carry out experiments, to cook, to make objects, to express oneself through non-verbal media. Finally, there were personal skills, like the ability for example, to get on with others, to express sympathy or other emotions and to behave appropriately in groups.

The third set of aims was concerned with the affective development of pupils. "In educating young people it seems irresponsible to ignore their emotional and moral natures or to assume that the educational process should not concern itself with attitudes and values. Schools should seek to contribute to the development in pupils of such dispositions as the following: to be concerned for people and to show compassion for them; to be capable of co-operating and forming relations with them; to be tolerant and fair; to respect evidence and be committed to the rational solution of problems; to be resourceful, self-reliant and hard-working and many more." (Page 22).

The fourth set of aims is concerned with the demands of society. Here the Committee emphasised that schools have an inescapable duty to ensure that young people are equipped to perform their various roles which life in their society entails.

From these aims they move on to eight modes. The first set of modes is concerned with linguistic and literary study, the second with mathematical studies, the third with scientific studies, the fourth with social studies, the fifth with creative and aesthetic activities, the sixth with physical activity, the seventh with religious studies and the eighth with morality. The Committee argued that each of these modes was essential for an adequate education. They argued that all pupils should continue until the eleventh year of schooling with work in each of these areas, no matter what level of attainment had already been reached. They did so on the grounds first that the vocational and educational intentions

of many pupils were still uncertain and that to abandon certain areas of studies at this stage would restrict vocational and academic choice later; that the full period was necessary to develop pupils capacity to the level that they thought necessary for life in society; and third, that there were concepts involved in many of these fields of study which could not be apprehended by pupils until they had reached the higher level of maturity that they were likely to reach by the time they were sixteen.

These basic concepts had to be translated into a model for the curriculum. The Committee opted for a subject based approach, which was not concerned exclusively with a narrow set of cognitive objectives. Rather each subject should be looked on as a resource for the development of conceptual understanding, social competence and a wide range of skills and emotional and moral attitudes. They did however, look for a systematic attempt at co-ordination across the whole programme.

The Committee had defined what were the areas in which pupils should have some degree of competence. They also recognised that this core programme should only be part of any student's total schooling. There were also options which included modern languages, practical subjects and additional work in any of the core areas where a youngster had particular interests.

(Insert TABLE I here)

Does this mean then that in the core areas there is a single level of attainment which should be expected of all pupils? The Committee thought not. They believed that there were differences in interest and ability which affected pupils learning. "If the demands are pitched too high pupils will be discouraged by their failure to meet them and they become frustrated or rebellious. If, on the other hand, demands are pitched too low pupils will lose interest, develop lazy, careless work habits and fail to realise their true potential" (Page 40). This poses a problem because "the acceptance of a wide range of ability in the school as a whole however, is a basic feature, indeed the basic feature of comprehensive education which rejects the principle of selective intake" (Page 40).

The solution the Committee offered was a common course taught in mixed ability classes for the first year or two of secondary schooling (that is, the eighth and ninth year of schooling). There was to be no streaming. However, by the time we come to S3 (year 10) " pupils ... should be given every opportunity

to progress at a pace and in a way which is appropriate to their capacity" (Page 41). For the last two years of compulsory schooling the Committee recommended that there should be up to three different but overlapping syllabus levels within the courses which are offered in the various subjects, not only those in the core but also those which were options. They recognised that there would be problems in differentiation and that this would vary from subject to subject, but they laid it down that "as a general principle however, courses should not be radically different from one level to the next. In order to allow for changes from one level to another every effort should be made to introduce common elements in courses at adjacent levels" (Page 42).

The question of assessing achievement at these levels was left for another Committee to consider. That second Committee produced a report called "Assessment for All". Since the Committee was chaired by Mr Dunning it is known as the Dunning Report. This report recognised that subject based assessment, such as we have in the British tradition, carries with it implications for the curriculum. "We consider that national guidelines for both syllabuses and assessment should be prepared in every subject to be assessed for national certification in S4. These guidelines should be produced for each subject as a syllabus/assessment document to indicate their inter-dependance ... The syllabus guidelines should specify the aims and objectives as well as content. The assessment guidelines should specify techniques to be employed and relate these to the objectives" (Page 73). In order to prevent there being a syllabus which was completely imposed on the schools from outside, the Committee went on to say "we consider that there should be both internal and external syllabus components at all levels and that the proportion of internal/external syllabus should not differ across levels for a given subject and for a particular school" (Page 74).

The recommendations of the Committee were in accord with the British tradition of externally set and marked achievement tests. For all subjects and at all levels there should be both internal and external assessments.

The Committee decided that the assessments should be based on defined levels of attainment. "The specification of the standard of attainment for each award should be referred to criteria detailed in the subject guidelines and should not depend on grading pupils relative to one another. Devising suitable criterion referenced tests presents a number of conceptual and practical difficulties and may indeed be difficult for some subjects. We consider that development work should be carried out in order to determine the practicability of deploying such tests on

a wide scale" (Page 78). The tests therefore were to be criterion referenced.

The definition of attainment at foundation level is in some sense easiest and indeed is the theme of this conference. The Committee said "the foundation award would be based on a desirable, minimal level of competence to be defined within each subject ... competence at this minimal level would be graded "pass"" (Page 75). That is, it would be necessary to define for every subject which the scheme was to cover, options as well as those in the core, what the level of attainment of the lowest achieving school leaver should be before we could say the school has failed with this youngster in this subject. What is it that everybody should be able to do in English and Mathematics; What everybody should know of Science or Social Studies; What is the minimal acceptable level of competence in Art or Music?

The next step up the ladder is to some degree arbitrary. That there is a level of achievement which is higher than the minimum and which should be defined and recognised is one which I take it we would all accept. Before we can set about defining it however, we have to have some point of reference. The point of reference recommended by the Committee is that of the average pupil in the group. In order to prepare a syllabus and examination at the "general" level it is necessary to define the achievement of the average pupil.

Finally, there was the more advanced level. The "credit" level. Here the external criterion was that achieved by the top 20% of achievers in any one subject.

The implementation of these recommendations would clearly have implications for school organisation. The Committee did not recommend a stratification of the school into tracks or streams. They specifically recognised that virtually all pupils should be taking different subjects at at least two levels and for those taking credit courses at three. Each pupil would be taking some foundation and some general courses and a minority would be taking some credit courses as well.

As for syllabuses the Committee thought that some subjects could be organised on an all through basis, that is, there was a logical progression from foundation to credit in such subjects as Mathematics and Foreign Languages for example, but that in others the credit level would be attained by taking extra modules, covering different material. That would apply for example, in Geography and

and History.

In the latter case there would be three overlapping syllabuses with different content. In the first case a single continuum with different levels of attainment within it.

(Insert FIGURE 1 here)

There were too implications for teaching. In some subjects mixed ability teaching might be appropriate, so that if there were a single syllabus with different levels of attainment a single class might encompass the full range. In other subjects it might be appropriate to split the attainment group into two so that you would have one group who were following foundation or general and another group who were following general or credit and so on. We carefully avoided the suggestion that it would ever be appropriate to organise pupils in three groups, those taking the foundation, those taking the general and those taking the credit courses. We believed that the overlapping curriculum should be so substantial that that kind of grouping would never be appropriate.

You are no doubt asking yourself what progress we have made. Is this system which I have described still aspiration or is it being turned into reality? These developments have been based on a great deal of research and pilot work and we will implement the new programme from 1984.

(Insert TABLE II here)

My colleague Dr Long will now report to you on the outcomes of the pilot work.

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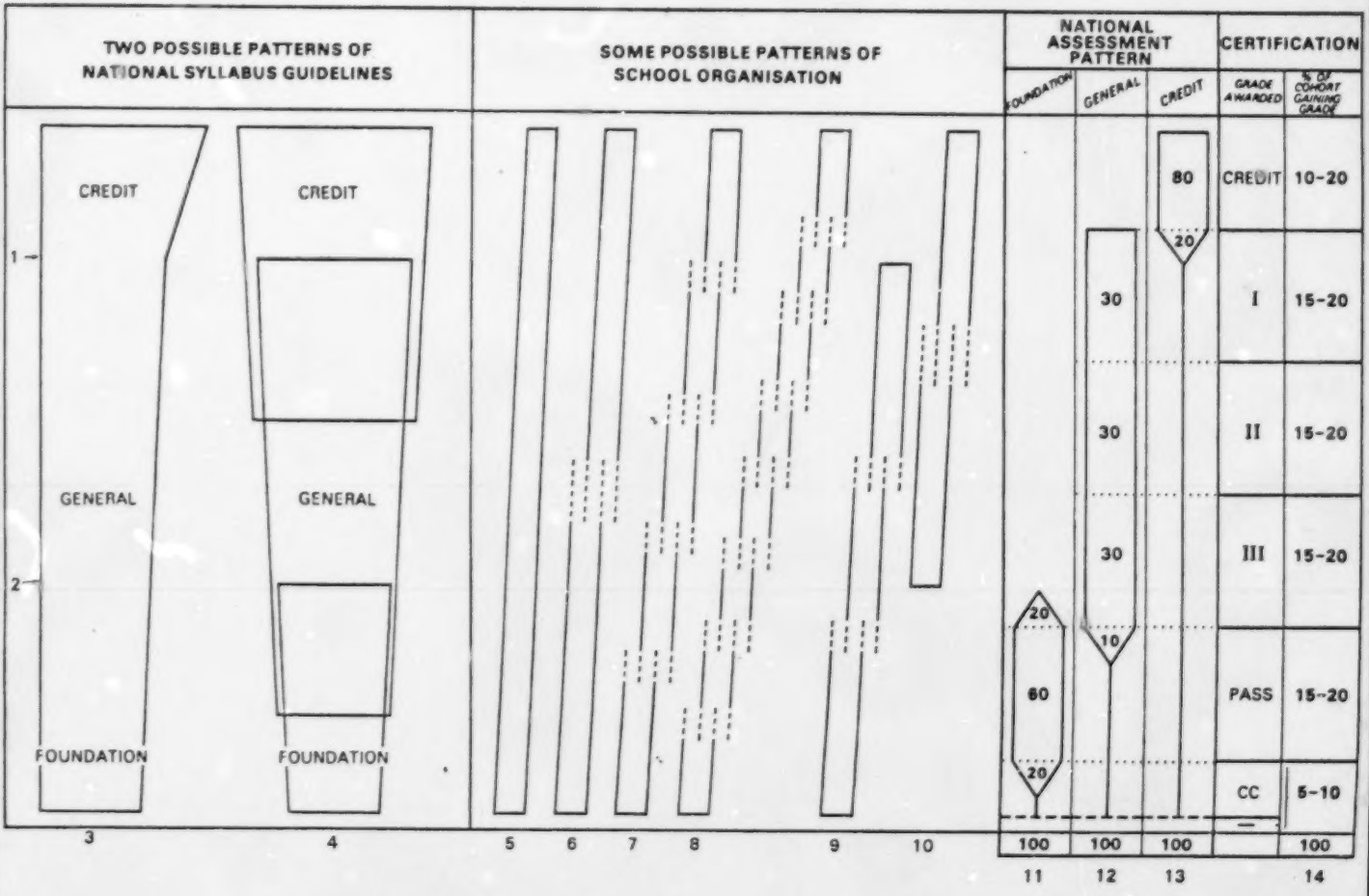
TABLE I

CORE AREA				ELECTIVE AREA
Pupils take all subjects	Pupils choose one subject	Pupils choose one subject	Pupils choose one subject	French German Spanish Latin Biology Chemistry Physics Geography History Modern Studies Engineering Drawing Metalwork Woodwork Catering Fabrics and Fashion Food and Nutrition Accounting Secretarial Studies Art Physical Education Religious Education Integrated Courses etc.
English + Mathematical Studies + Physical Education + Religious and Moral Education	Economics or History or Geography or Modern Studies (All to include a module or modules based on a study of contemporary society)	Biology or Chemistry or Physics or General Science or Engineering Science or Food Science	Art or Music or Drama or Dance or Creative Craft	

TABLE II

	Course	Level
Phase 1:	For introduction in 1984 with certification from 1986	
	English	FGC
	Mathematics	FGC
	Science	FG(C)
	Social and Vocational Skills	F (G)
Phase 2:	For introduction in 1985 with certification from 1987	
	Art	FGC
	French	FGC
	Home Economics	FGC
	Craft and Design	FGC
	Latin	GC
	Contemporary Social Studies	F (G)
	Health Studies	F (G)
Phase 3:	For introduction in 1986 with certification from 1988	
	Business Studies	FGC
	Gaelic	FGC
	Music	FGC
	German	FGC
	Geography	FGC
	History	FGC
	Modern Studies	FGC
	Physical Education	FGC
	Biology	GC
	Chemistry	GC
	Physics	GC
	Economics	GC
	Italian	GC
	Russian	GC
	Spanish	GC

FIGURE 1


TWO POSSIBLE PATTERNS OF NATIONAL SYLLABUS GUIDELINES
SOME POSSIBLE PATTERNS OF SCHOOL ORGANISATION
NATIONAL ASSESSMENT PATTERN
CERTIFICATION
FOUNDATION
GENERAL
CREDIT
GRADE AWARDED
% OF COHORT GAINING GRADE
CREDIT
CREDIT
GENERAL
GENERAL
FOUNDATION
FOUNDATION
1
2
80
20
30
30
30
20
10
60
20
CREDIT 10-20
I 15-20
II 15-20
III 15-20
PASS 15-20
CC 5-10
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